

## Challenging the East/West Dichotomy: Parallels and Differences between “Jewish Councils” in Western Europe and Beyond

David Cohen was professor of Classics at the University of Amsterdam and co-chairman of the Dutch Jewish Council (*De Joodse Raad voor Amsterdam*, JR) between its establishment in February 1941 and its dissolution in September 1943. After the end of the Second World War, he produced notebooks that testify to his wish to better understand the Jewish Council phenomenon in Nazi-occupied Europe. The notebooks, perhaps because of his often-illegible handwriting, have remained completely unexplored. Yet these records are worthy of attention, not least because they show how, following the war, Cohen attempted to account for his wartime decisions by seeking parallels with other “Jewish Councils” and the decisions of their leaders. In a scholarly manner, he assembled information about the Dutch Jewish Council and similar representative Jewish organizations imposed on Jewish communities in Germany, Denmark, Romania, Austria, France, Hungary, Poland, and other places. In the notebooks, eleven in total, he quoted or paraphrased books and articles he read on the topic; sometimes he supplemented these notes with his personal observations.<sup>1</sup>

One of the notebooks testifies to a conversation between Cohen and Leo Baeck on May 4, 1948. Baeck was the former head of the Reich Association for Jews in Germany (*Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*), the successor of the *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden*, which

1 Notebooks David Cohen, Inv. Nos. 6-9, 248-0294, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (hereafter NIOD). There were other occasions where Cohen compared the responsibilities of the Dutch Council to those in other countries. See, for example, David Cohen's unpublished report on the history of the Jews in the Netherlands written in August/September 1945: “Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland tijdens de Bezetting,” p. 10, 181j, NIOD.

was established in September 1933 to confront the problems German Jews faced under the Nazi regime. The *Reichsvereinigung* fulfilled many tasks that can be compared to those of “Jewish Councils” elsewhere, including the implementation of Nazi policies and preparations for the confiscation of Jewish property.<sup>2</sup> Soon after he was deported to Theresienstadt in January 1943, Baeck became the honorary head of the Council of Elders there.<sup>3</sup> The conversation between the two men took place during a difficult period for Cohen. The verdict of the Jewish Honor Court in the Netherlands, which ruled that the former council chairmen were no longer permitted to fulfill any representative functions for the Jewish community, had been published five months earlier. Moreover, through a Special Jurisdiction (*Bijzondere Rechtspleging*), the Dutch State conducted preliminary investigations into the Jewish Council in this period.<sup>4</sup> Cohen seemed to find comfort in studying how Jewish Council leaders in other countries had operated. His attempt to grasp the situation in other countries, frantically noting down everything he could find on the topic, was part of his larger effort in the immediate postwar years to contextualize and justify his wartime choices and behavior. He wanted to convince those who accused him of betrayal of the righteousness of his choices.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps looking at other countries was a way to show that Jewish leaders across Nazi-occupied Europe had faced the same dilemmas and that many had responded similarly. It was a way to demonstrate that his cooperation with German authorities was not unparalleled.

2 Beate Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945*, transl. William Templar (New York: Berghahn, 2013). See also Philipp Dinkelaker's article in this volume.

3 Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 50-58.

4 For further reading on the Jewish honor court in the Netherlands, see: Ido de Haan, “An Unresolved Controversy: The Jewish Honor Court in the Netherlands, 1946-1950,” in *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel after the Holocaust*, eds. Laura Jokusch and Gabriel N. Finder (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 107-36; K. C. Nanno, “In 't Veld,” *De Joodse Ereraad* (Den Haag: SDU Uitgeverij). For the state trial against the Jewish Council, see: Johannes Houwink ten Cate, “De justitie en de Joodsche Raad,” in *Geschiedenis en cultuur—Achtien opstellen*, eds. Ed Jonker and Maarten van Rossem (The Hague: SDU, 1990), 149-68.

5 See, for example: Cohen, “Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland tijdens de bezetting,” 181j, NIOD, as well as his testimonies during the preliminary investigations of the state trial against the Council leadership—which can be found at the Central Archive of Special Jurisdiction in The Hague, the Netherlands, CABR file 107481—and Cohen's memoirs, published by Erik Somers as *Voorzitter van de Joodse Raad: De herinneringen van David Cohen, 1941-1943* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2010).

Cohen, a trained historian, was ahead of his time in attempting to contextualize his wartime choices by drawing parallels with other countries, including those in Eastern Europe. In the Netherlands, like Belgium and France, it has taken scholars decades to engage in comparative analyses on the Jewish Council phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> The first overview of the establishment history of the Dutch Council and its activities was published as early as 1945.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by more general publications on the Dutch history of the German occupation that also addressed the role of the Dutch Jewish Council. There were historians who dominated Second World War historiography for decades: Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser, and Loe de Jong. In 1950, Herzberg largely defended the council; in 1965, Presser approached the topic in an ambiguous and even emotional manner, claiming that the council leadership could have known the fate that awaited the Jews; De Jong followed Hannah Arendt's (in)famous line of reasoning, arguing that the council should have refused to cooperate and that it had first and foremost been an instrument in the hands of the Germans.<sup>8</sup>

In the broader Holocaust historiography produced during this period, studies on "Jewish Councils" were mostly focused on the local level, or limited to the boundaries of the nation-state. To this day, even though "Jewish Councils" have been a central topic in Holocaust historiography for decades, comprehensive transnational and/or comparative monographs on this topic are rare.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, there

6 For comparative investigations, see, for example: Hans Blom, "The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands: A Comparative Western European Perspective," *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989): 333-51; Dan Michman, "De oprichting van de 'Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam' vanuit een vergelijkend perspectief," in *Derde Jaarboek van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1992), 75-100; Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, "UGIF in France, AJB in Belgium, Joodsche Raad in the Netherlands: Similar Strategies of Legality, Varying Contexts, Different Outcomes," *Perspectives* 26 (2021): 51-75; Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, *Jodenvervolgving in Nederland, Frankrijk en België, 1940-1945: overeenkomsten, verschillen, oorzaken* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011), 388-91, 583-633, 648-51, 672-73; Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

7 Koert Berkley, *Overzicht van het ontstaan, de werkzaamheden en het streven van den Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Plastica, 1945).

8 Bart van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad: een geschiedenis van de Joodse Raad voor Amsterdam, 1941-1943* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2022), 299-313.

9 Isaiah Trunk's study *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation*, published in 1972, allowed for comparative analyses, but it was not comparative in nature. Evgeny Finkel's work is inherently comparative but not exclusively focused on Jewish Councils: *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during*

has been little to no interaction between scholars of the “East” and “West.”<sup>10</sup>

The aim of this article is to provide a more integrative understanding of the Jewish Council phenomenon. Using Western Europe as a case study, it builds on scholarship on Central and Eastern Europe, and draws parallels with “Jewish Councils” in other localities. While it extends beyond the limits of this article to engage in a full-fledged comparative analysis, it nevertheless identifies patterns in histories of the establishment and functioning of these organizations as well as the choices of these organs’ leaders. As such, this article seeks to diminish the East/West dichotomy that still exists in Holocaust historiography in general, and the historiography of “Jewish Councils” in particular. Moreover, by highlighting the differences between and among the “Jewish Councils” in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, this article shows that Western Europe should not be considered “one bloc.” Above all, by expanding the geographic focus across local and national boundaries, this article contributes to the larger objective of this edited volume: a better and transnational understanding of the nature of the “Jewish Council” phenomenon across Nazi-occupied Europe.

### *Jewish Councils versus Jewish Associations*

On September 21, 1939, head of the Security Police Reinhard Heydrich sent his famous *Schnellbrief* to the chiefs of all the task forces (*Einsatzgruppen*) of the Security Police. This letter can be seen as an attempt to provide a model for the “Councils of Jewish Elders” (*Jüdische Ältestenräte*) or “*Judenräte*,” that, according to Heydrich’s plans, were to be “composed of up to 24 male Jews.”<sup>11</sup> Standardization was necessary because, as Dan Michman has shown, just days after the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, SS officials imposed various Jewish umbrella organizations on local communities, using different desig-

*the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*.

10 Dan Michman, “Comparative Research on the Holocaust in Western Europe: Its Achievements, its Limits and a Plea for a More Integrative Approach,” *Moreshet Journal for the Study of the Holocaust and Antisemitism* 19 (2020): 286–306.

11 “Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei übersendet den Einsatzgruppen in Polen am 21. September 1939 Richtlinien für die Vorgehensweise gegenüber Juden” (dok. 12), in *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland, 1933–1945: Polen September 1939–Juli 1941*, vol. 4, eds. Klaus-Peter Friedrich and Andrea Löw (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011), 88–92.

nations.<sup>12</sup> Two months later, on November 28, 1939, Governor-General Hans Frank officially ordered the establishment of *Judenräte* in the *Generalgouvernement*.<sup>13</sup> While Heydrich's *Schnellbrief* and Frank's order differed in terms of the precise tasks they assigned the councils, both agreed that the organizations would be responsible for the execution of German orders.<sup>14</sup>

The Jewish Councils that were imposed on Jewish communities in the period that followed were first and foremost *local* institutions that were not anchored in law.<sup>15</sup> That is, there were no official statutes that formalized their inception. Instead, local town commanders or governors approached Jewish leaders and ordered the establishment of these organizations either verbally or in writing.<sup>16</sup> Local Jewish Councils were instituted in the territories of occupied Poland and, after 1941, also in the occupied Soviet territories. The timing of their establishment differed, and in some places, *Judenräte* never existed.<sup>17</sup>

Like most Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe, and unlike its counterparts in Belgium and France, the Dutch Jewish Council was initially also established as an organization with only local jurisdiction. After all, it was named *De Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam*, the Jewish Council for Amsterdam, the Dutch capital city. As I have argued elsewhere, some precise details of the council's establishment history are unknown, but we do know that Hans Böhmcker personally ordered the formation of such an

12 Dan Michman, "Why did Heydrich Write the *Schnellbrief*? A Remark on the Reason and on its Significance," *Yad Vashem Studies* 32 (2004), 434-35. For further reading on the earliest references to the "Jewish Council" concept, dating back to April 1933 (though a different terminology was then used), see: Dan Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule: The Evolution and Implementation of an Administrative Concept," in *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective: Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 161-65.

13 Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1972] 1996), 1-4; Michman, "Jewish Leadership in Extremis," 328. As Michman has argued, by deviating from Heydrich's *Schnellbrief*, General Governor Hans Frank probably hoped to regain control over Jewish affairs in his jurisdiction; see: Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule," 167.

14 Trunk, *Judenrat*, 4.

15 In the General Government, slightly different terminologies were used, varying from *Ältestenrat*, or variations of *Ältestenrat* (i.e., from 1941 to 1942 in Bendsburg: "Ältestenrat der jüdischen Kultusgemeinde in Bendsburg") to *Jüdische Gemeinde* in Reichshof [Rzeszów]. See: Trunk, *Judenrat*, 11.

16 Michman, "Jewish Leadership in Extremis," 328.

17 Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule," 167.

organization.<sup>18</sup> Böhmcker was the Amsterdam representative of Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who was directly answerable to Hitler. The direct cause of the council's establishment was a violent clash between Dutch Nazis and Jews in the Amsterdam Jewish quarter in February 1941, and order needed to be restored. This indeed became the first task assigned to the council.<sup>19</sup>

In various respects, the Dutch Council was modeled after the Polish-style *Judenrat*: not only was it was (initially) a local institution; its establishment also resulted from a verbal order, there was no official statute that gave the council legal status, and around two dozen Jews took up seats on its central board.<sup>20</sup> As Michman has argued, the fact that Seyss-Inquart, who had been Hans Frank's deputy in Poland, agreed to impose a local *Judenrat* can be explained by the fact that he knew about this model from personal experience.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the highest SS representative in the Netherlands, Hanns Albin Rauter, as well as the commander of the security police, Wilhelm Harster, had previously served in the Kraków area, where they witnessed the establishment of local *Judenräte*.<sup>22</sup>

Just months after the Dutch council's establishment in February, both German authorities and the two council chairmen Abraham Asscher and David Cohen wished to extend the organization's authority to the national level.<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising that a national model was considered more practical. After all, Jewish social and religious life in the Netherlands was generally organized nationally. For example, the Committee for Special Jewish Affairs (CBBJ), founded in 1933 in response to the persecution of Jews in Germany, as well as the Jewish Coordinating Committee, which was established in December 1940 to provide aid and relief to Jews in the

18 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 62-68.

19 Notice of the permanent Commission of the Nederlands-Israëlitische Hoofdsynagoge, 14 February 1941, Doo3186, Jewish Museum Amsterdam. For an overview of those who eventually made up the central board of the council, see: Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 22-27.

20 Michman, "The Uniqueness of the Joodse Raad in the Western European Context," *Dutch Jewish History: Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Institute for Research on Dutch Jewry, 1993), 371-80.

21 Ibid., 376.

22 Michman, "Jewish 'Headships' under Nazi Rule," 169.

23 With the help of jurist Kurt Rabl, Reich Commissioner Arthur Seyss-Inquart, hoping to sideline the SS in the supervision of the Dutch Jewish Council, had wanted to transform the organization into a "Verband der Juden in die Niederlanden" with national authority. This plain failed, however, probably due to intervention by SS authorities (in Berlin). See: Dan Michman, "De oprichting van de 'Joodsche Raad Voor Amsterdam' vanuit een vergelijkend perspectief," 89-90.

Netherlands, operated on the national level. Moreover, while most Jews (60 percent) were concentrated in Amsterdam, others lived scattered across the country in cities like Rotterdam, Enschede, The Hague, and in smaller towns. A central office in the capital city with local and regional departments was, thus, more in accordance with how Jewish life was organized in the Netherlands before the German occupation.

The first steps in the “nationalization” of the Dutch council were taken in spring 1941. On May 27, the council compiled a list of all Jewish non-religious organizations in the country.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, Böhmcker’s earlier request to provide an overview of such organizations in Amsterdam was now extended to the entire country.<sup>25</sup> Soon, Jewish organizations across the Netherlands were either dissolved or incorporated into the Jewish Council. In October 1941, the jurisdiction of the organization was officially extended to the national level. The council’s juridical—or, more precisely, non-juridical—status remained unaltered, however, despite the organization’s chairmen’s earlier (April 1941) request for an official statute that would enable the council “to act as a legal entity.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, the Dutch Council, from the Western European perspective, had a unique status: it was a national organization, but unlike the situation in Belgium and France, it operated without legal recognition.

We can identify some parallels with Hungary in this regard. In March 1944, before the Nazi takeover of Hungary, members of the *Sonder-einsatzkommando Eichmann* (SEK)—including Dieter Wisliceny, Theodor Dannecker (who, as we will see, had previously witnessed the establishment of the Jewish compulsory organization, the UGIF, in France), and Franz Novack—initially proposed a “Jewish Council” with nationwide authority, but which, similar to the Netherlands, would not be grounded in law.<sup>27</sup> The idea of a national organization was abandoned,

24 Letter Asscher and Cohen to Böhmcker, May 27, 1941, 182.26, NIOD.

25 Letter Hans Böhmcker to the chairmen of the Jewish Council, March 18, 1941, 182.26, NIOD.

26 Letter Asscher and Cohen to Böhmcker, April 7, 1941, 182.26. On November 9, the council chairmen outlined why it was problematic that German authorities had not agreed to give the organization a juridical status. Among other things, the financial resources of Jewish organizations that had been disbanded could not be transferred to the accounts of the council. See: Concept letter to Beauftragte Böhmcker, Willy Lages and Werner Schröder, November 9, 1941, 182.26. See also: the blueprint of the “Jewish Councils for the Netherlands,” produced by the council leadership, in which it is proposed that the national council would be a “legal entity”: *Ontwerpstatuut Joodsche Raad voor Nederlands*, 182.1, NIOD.

27 Dan Michman, “The Jewish Councils Phenomenon: New Insights and Their Implications for the Hungarian Case,” in *The Holocaust in Hungary: A European*

however, when these SS functionaries realized the Jewish communities in Hungary were too fragmented to be united under one centralized umbrella organization. Instead, like the Dutch council, initially a local Budapest “Jewish Council” was established. Once Central Council leaders presented themselves to Eichmann’s representatives, the latter, Hermann Krumei and Dieter Wisliceny, indicated that the council, through local branches, would have control over the entire country after all.<sup>28</sup>

While this process of expanding its jurisdiction was similar to the Dutch case, the Central Council in Budapest never obtained the centralized position the Dutch Jewish Council’s main office in Amsterdam had. Instead, the decentralized nature of the interactions between the Budapest office and local branches of the Central Council across Hungary bears closer resemblance to the “Jewish Councils” in Belgium and France.<sup>29</sup> The nature of highly diverse Jewish communities—which in Belgium and France included large numbers of immigrants and refugees who organized themselves according to the local communities they had left behind—was such that their community representation had a strong local character, and, thus, it was nearly impossible to unite them into one central organization.<sup>30</sup> In Hungary, the Central Council in practice only had control over the Jews in Budapest.<sup>31</sup> In smaller communities throughout Hungary, “Jewish Councils” were established through different local procedures carried out independently of the Central Council and sometimes through the initiative of local SS personnel. In some cases, “Jewish Councils” were not set up at all.<sup>32</sup>

In Belgium and France, the respective natures of the *Association des Juifs en Belgique* (AJB) and the *Union Générale des Israélites de France* (UGIF) were very different from the Dutch Jewish Council. The AJB was modeled after the Reich Association of Jews in Germany and had

*Perspective*, ed. Judit Molnár (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 258. It should be noted that in order to obstruct German control over the council and ensure that Hungarian authorities could oversee the confiscation of Jewish property, the “Jewish Council” was written into Hungarian Law in April 1944; see: *ibid.*, 261–62.

28 Michman, “The Jewish Councils Phenomenon,” 259.

29 For further reading on the autonomy of the local AJB and UGIF departments versus the centralized nature of the JR in the Netherlands, see: Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 165–77.

30 For an overview of the different nature of the Jewish communities in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France on the eve of the Second World War, see: Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 21–55, 177–91. For Hungary, see: Michman, “The Jewish Councils Phenomenon,” 259–60.

31 Michman, “The Jewish Councils Phenomenon,” 261.

32 See, for example, in Győr and Nagyvárad. *Ibid.*, 259, 263.



enjoyed national authority since its founding in November 1941.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, in France, the armistice of June 22, 1940 divided the country into a German-occupied zone and an unoccupied zone administered by the collaborationist Vichy regime. This division impacted the establishment of the UGIF in November 1941. The UGIF-Sud was operative in the unoccupied zone (renamed the “southern” zone after the German invasion of the southwest of the country in November 1942); the UGIF-Nord governed the occupied zone (later the “northern” zone). Both organizations operated independently, and despite attempts to bring the UGIF-Sud under the UGIF-Nord’s umbrella in 1943, they continued to do so until they were dissolved shortly before liberation.<sup>34</sup>

Several factors explain why German and Vichy authorities chose to implement the national rather than the local “Jewish Council” model in Belgium and France from the outset. An important explanation is that the position of the German Security Police (SiPo-SD) was weak.<sup>35</sup> SS functionaries had to negotiate the establishment of the AJB and the UGIF with representatives of the Military Administration. As I have argued elsewhere, the Military Administration and, in the case of France, the Vichy regime (initially) obstructed the establishment of “Jewish Councils” as they wished to maintain their authority at the expense of the SiPo-SD.<sup>36</sup> This resulted in continuous discussions between representatives of the Military Administration, the SiPo-SD, and, in the case of France, Vichy officials. This not only delayed the establishment of “Jewish Councils” in Belgium and France but also necessitated compromises. As a result, the AJB, the UGIF-Nord, and the UGIF-Sud became *associations* which, as Michman has argued, was the more “moderate”

33 Dan Michman, “De oprichting van de VJB in internationaal perspectief” in *De curatoren van het getto: de vereniging van de Joden in België tijdens de nazi-bezetting*, ed. Jean-Philippe Schreiber and Rudi van Doorslaer (Tielt: Lannoo, 2004), 42. In a 1942 report on Jewry in Belgium, head of the SiPo-SD in Brussels Ernst Ehlers confirmed that the AJB had been modeled after the Reich Association in Germany. See: “Sonderbericht: Das Judentum in Belgien,” January 31, 1942, pp. 37–38, SVG-R. 184/Tr 50 077, Marburg, Dienst Oorlogsslachtoffers (DOS).

34 Jacques Adler, *The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940–1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1985]), 138–43; Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 154.

35 Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, “UGIF in France, AJB in Belgium, Joodsche Raad in the Netherlands: Similar Strategies of Legality, Varying Contexts, Different Outcomes,” *Perspectives* (2021): 57; Dan Michman, “Jewish ‘Headships’ under Nazi Rule: The Evolution and Implementation of an Administrative Concept,” in *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective. Conceptualizations, Terminology, Approaches and Fundamental Issues* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 159–75.

36 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 73–87.

model with “national” authority.<sup>37</sup> While Eichmann and his representatives, when possible, opted for the local Judenrat model directly overseen by local SS and police authorities, these examples show that local contexts sometimes required alternative approaches.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the local *Judenrat* model, these Jewish Associations in Belgium and France, as well as the Central Council in Hungary, were not directly overseen by local German security police authorities (exclusively).<sup>39</sup> Instead, they were governed by several nationally operating institutions. In France, both the UGIF-Nord and the UGIF-Sud were subordinate to the Vichy-led General Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (CGQJ). In Belgium, various German and Belgian institutions shared the supervision of the AJB: the German police, divisions of the Military Administration, and the Belgian Ministries of the Interior, Health, and Justice.<sup>40</sup> In Hungary, the Central Council was subordinate to Hungarian—not German—authorities.<sup>41</sup>

We can draw parallels between the AJB, the UGIF, and similar national organizations that were established not only in Germany (the *Reichsvereinigung*) and Hungary (the Central Council) but also in satellite states such as Slovakia, where the Jewish Center, established on September 26, 1940 by the Slovak regime in coordination with the German advisor for Jewish affairs Dieter Wisliceny, replaced all existing Jewish organizations and governed all aspects of Jewish life.<sup>42</sup> Without doubt, the local context of Slovakia—i.e., the close collaboration of Slovak authorities with Nazi Germany, and the fact that the Jewish Center was established at a time when the country was not occupied by the German

37 Dan Michman, “On the Historical Interpretation of the Judenräte Issue: Between Intentionalism, Functionalism and the Integrationist Approach of the 1990s,” in *On Germans and Jews under the Nazi Regime: Essays by Three Generations of Historians*, ed. Moshe Zimmerman (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 2006), 395.

38 Michman, “The Jewish Councils Phenomenon,” 256, 258.

39 Griffioen and Zeller, “UGIF in France, AJB in Belgium, Joodsche Raad in the Netherlands,” 58.

40 Ibid., 64; Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 89–90.

41 Michman, “The Jewish Councils Phenomenon,” 262.

42 “Die slowakische Regierung verfügt am 26. September 1940 die Schaffung der Judenzentrale als Zwangsorganisation der Juden” (dok. 23), in: *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland, 1933–1945: Slowakei, Rumänien und Bulgarien*, vol. 13, eds. Mariana Hausleitner, Souzana Hazan, and Barbara Hutzelmann (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), 156–57; Denisa Nešťáková, “The Jewish Centre and Labour Camps in Slovakia,” in *Between Collaboration and Resistance: Papers from the 21st Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Extermination Sites*, ed. Karoline Georg, Verena Meier, Paula A. Opperman (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2020), 130–32.

army—played a role in the institution of the more “moderate” national model. Unlike local *Judenräte*—and like the AJB in Belgium, the UGIF in France, and the Central Council in Hungary—the Jewish Center in Slovakia was overseen by local authorities (i. e., it was directly subordinate to President Jozef Tiso), and it was established by an official decree.<sup>43</sup> The Jewish Center also had local branches in district towns.<sup>44</sup> The national “*Judenvereinigung*” model was, therefore, imposed in case the SS had to share its authority with other “German power centres,” as Michman has argued, as well as when local governments were willing to actively collaborate in the process of establishing and overseeing these organizations.<sup>45</sup>

These examples show that local conditions were decisive in shaping “Jewish Councils”—whether a local or national model was adopted—and they also emphasize the transnational nature of the Jewish Council phenomenon. SS functionaries—including Wisliceny and Dannecker, who were involved in the establishment of several “Jewish Councils” across both Western and Eastern Europe—drew on the experiences they had in the one geographic location and employed this knowledge as soon as they were transferred elsewhere.<sup>46</sup>

### *The Timing of Establishment*

There is an important difference between Western Europe, Central Europe, the occupied Polish territories, and other parts of Eastern Europe when it comes to the establishment histories of the “Jewish Councils.” Once the Germans invaded Western Europe, it took almost a year before concerted attempts to establish “Jewish Councils” were made, as opposed to the very swift establishment of such bodies in, for example, occupied Poland. Part of the explanation for this dissimilarity might be found in the different status Western Europe had in the Nazi worldview as compared to Eastern Europe. The idea that living space (*Lebensraum*) had to be sought in the East, where inferior peoples—Slavs and Jews—lived, was inherently part of the imperial and racial ideologies of the Nazis. The so-called *Generalplan Ost* was aimed at the forced expulsion, enslavement, and eradication of these inferior groups to make space

43 Neštáková, “The Jewish Centre and Labour Camps in Slovakia,” 131n54.

44 Katarína Hradská, *Holocaust na Slovensku: Ústredňa Židov*, vol. 8 (Bratislava: Klemo, 2008), 409-10.

45 See Michman, “The Jewish Councils Phenomenon,” 258.

46 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 56-87.

for the ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) who would be resettled in these territories. Even before the invasion of Poland, policies were formulated to achieve these aims. As scholars have shown, these policies radicalized quickly, not least because there was ample room for initiative and because ideological commitment was strong.<sup>47</sup>

Western Europe, by contrast, was occupied first and foremost out of strategic (military) motives. The Nazis believed these countries might stand in the way of their aim to create living space in the East. While the “Jewish problem” also had to be solved in the West (through the removal of Jews), the area itself and its inhabitants were perceived differently. The Dutch and Flemish were even seen as a Germanic brother peoples who needed to be Nazified, hence the appointment of Nazis with strong ideological backgrounds to leading positions in the Netherlands.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, whereas Eastern Europe became the site of mass murder, Western Europe was considered useful in terms of its economic and industrial capacity to support German war industries. German interests in the West, in short, differed from those in the East.

The result of these differences was that German authorities in the West refrained from the radical implementation of anti-Jewish policies from the start because they feared this would increase anti-German sentiment, in addition to other reasons. As the Military Commander of Belgium and Northern France Alexander von Falkenhausen wrote in December 1940, the non-Jewish population did not feel there existed a “racial problem”; thus, caution was required.<sup>49</sup> Lacking the financial resources and personnel to directly govern Western Europe, the Nazi regime, furthermore, depended on the cooperation of local bureaucracies. To safeguard security and stability, anti-Jewish measures and policies,

47 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998); and *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London: Allan Lane, 2000); Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: das Führerkorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburg Edition, 2002); Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2002); Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion, 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003).

48 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 48.

49 Letter from the Military Commander of Belgium and Northern France addressed to the Reichskommissar für die besetzten niederländischen Gebieten—Generalkommissar für Verwaltung und Justiz, December 21, 1940, SVG-R.184/Tr 50 077, DOS; “On 21 December 1940 the German military administration explains the measures to be taken concerning Jewish public officials in Berlin” (doc. 164), in *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany*, vol. 5, eds. Katja Happe, Michael Mayer, Maja Peers et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter and Yad Vashem, 2021), 456-58.

including the establishment of “Jewish Councils,” were only gradually implemented in the West.

Even though compulsory Jewish representative organizations in the West were only established in 1941, there were earlier attempts to found such bodies. For example, the moment he arrived in France in 1940, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dannecker, Eichmann’s representative for Jewish affairs in France, frantically worked to achieve this objective. He initially failed not only due to the lack of support from both the Military Administration and the Vichy government but also because in September 1940, religious Jewish leaders refused to assume responsibilities in secular organizations.<sup>50</sup> Throughout 1941, Dannecker continued his efforts to set up a *Zwangsvereinigung*, but only in summer 1941 did he finally manage to convince officials from the Military Administration and the Vichy regime to establish what became the UGIF in the German-occupied zone. Hoping to maintain authority over anti-Jewish policies in France, Xavier Vallat, head of the Vichy-led CGQJ, then ensured that the UGIF would be established in *both* the occupied zone (UGIF-Nord) and the unoccupied zone (UGIF-Sud).

In terms of the timing of the organizations’ establishment, we can identify a significant difference between the Netherlands, on the one hand, and Belgium and France, on the other. That is, the Dutch Jewish Council was established nine months prior to its Western European counterparts (in February 1941 versus November 1941). The most important explanation for the delayed establishment of the AJB in Belgium and the UGIF in France can be traced back to differences of opinion concerning the need for “Jewish Councils” between officials of the Military Administration, the SS, and—in the case of France—Vichy representatives. In Belgium, objections to the establishment of a “Jewish Council” included the idea that the Jewish communities in the country were too fragmented to be united under one umbrella organization.<sup>51</sup> Other concerns included fears of alienating non-Jews and causing unrest, the belief that Belgian and French societies were not ready for an imposed Jewish body, and, in the case of France, a reluctance to implement

50 Adler, *The Jews of Paris*, 57–58. Richard Cohen, *The Burden of Conscience: French Jewish Leadership during the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 26–27.

51 “On 15 October 1941, the German military administration decides to establish a compulsory association of Jews in Belgium” (doc. 176), in *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany, 1933–1945*, vol. 5 *Western and Northern Europe 1940–June 1942* (Oldenbourg and Jerusalem: De Gruyter and Yad Vashem, 2021), 482–83.

anti-Jewish policies dictated by the Germans and an initial hesitation to enforce legislation that would affect Jewish immigrants and French Jewry equally.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, unlike the situation in the Netherlands, where unrest had broken out in the Jewish quarter in February 1941, there was no direct cause that necessitated the establishment of a Jewish representative organization through which the Germans could impose their laws in Belgium and France.

### *Cooperation during the Mass Deportations*

During the conversation between David Cohen and Leo Baeck in May 1948, about which the former provided a two-page summary in one of his notebooks, the two men discussed the nature of the Jewish Council in the Netherlands and the Reich Association in Germany, as well as the choices they had made. After their talk, Cohen noted that the Reich Association had always negotiated with “German authorities and the Gestapo” (sic) and that Baeck had considered these negotiations self-evident because for some time, it had allowed him to help Jews emigrate from Nazi Germany. Cohen also noted that like the Dutch Jewish Council, when the deportation process started, the Reich Association attempted to save as many elderly persons and prominent figures, who were important to the Jewish community, as possible.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Cohen was trying to rationalize his own wartime policies through his conversation with Baeck. Whether or not Baeck spoke from personal experience or just in general terms about the policies of the Reich Association cannot be deduced from Cohen’s notes.

As Beate Meyer has indicated, it remains unclear in what kind of activities Baeck was precisely engaged during the time of the deportations, starting in October 1941; contemporaries have claimed that he withdrew inwardly from the Reich Association in this period.<sup>54</sup> Besides, the Reich Association did not seem to have engaged in a systematic policy of saving the elderly. Instead, the organization’s work focused on all groups in need of special protection including *both* the very old and the very young.<sup>55</sup> Whether or not Baeck told Cohen that the Reich Association focused its

52 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 69-87.

53 Notebook No. 1 David Cohen, p. 28, Inv. No. 6, 248-0294, NIOD.

54 Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act*, 122-23.

55 Meyer has indicated that caring for groups that needed special protection was at the heart of the Reich Association. This was an important motivation for Jewish functionaries to continue their work in the organization. In doing so, they attempted

help on older people, or whether Cohen had either misunderstood or deliberately misquoted Baeck remains unclear. What *is* certain, however, was that the Reich Association, like the Dutch Jewish Council and similar German-imposed Jewish organizations elsewhere, interfered in the deportation process by attempting to have certain individuals removed from deportation lists.<sup>56</sup> This is probably what Baeck referred to when he indicated that the Reich Association had attempted to save those who were important to the community.

It must have felt like a relief to Cohen that Baeck outlined a similar policy for which he (Cohen) had been condemned by the Jewish Court of Honor in the Netherlands shortly before their conversation.<sup>57</sup> European Jews established honor courts across the continent to deal with alleged wartime collaborators and purge them from their communities. The Dutch honor court was established in early 1946, and it investigated Jews whose behavior during the German occupation had not accorded with the principle of “Jewish solidarity.”<sup>58</sup> On December 26, 1947, the verdict of the Court of Honor was publicized. Among other things, it ruled that the establishment of the Jewish Council, the publication of its weekly *Het Joodsche Weekblad*, as well as the organization’s assistance with the implementation of the yellow star policy were reprehensible (*laakbaar*) acts. The Jewish Council’s cooperation in the process of deportation, and specifically the chairmen’s agreement—after they had been ordered to do so by Hauptsturmführer Ferdinand aus der Fünten (head of the *Zentralstelle*)—to compile lists of the names of Jews who would no longer benefit from the protection of the council in May 1943, were considered “very reprehensible” (*zeer laakbaar*).<sup>59</sup>

(in vain) to protect both the very old and the very young. Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act*, 137-47.

56 Meyer, *A Fatal Balancing Act*, 147-52.

57 At the same time the two former chairmen had the conversation Cohen summarized in his notebook, Leo Baeck provided a positive testimony about David Cohen when the latter’s wartime role was investigated by a Dutch state court. Baeck gave a positive description of Cohen’s character and the assistance he provided when he was still immersed in Jewish refugee aid, yet Baeck also claimed that he did not know “the course Prof. Cohen took in the Jewish Council,” continuing that he was “convinced whatever he [Cohen-LV] did then, it was done in honesty and in the hope of helping the people.” See: Letter of Leo Baeck, CABR 107491 VI (doos 5, map 14), NA.

58 Reglement van den Joodschen Eereraad, p. 3, Inv. No. 1, 234 (Joodse Eereraad te Amsterdam), Noord-Hollands Archief (NHA).

59 Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad, 26 December 1947, Inv. No. 9, 234 (Joodse Eereraad te Amsterdam), NHA. For a thorough substantiation of the verdict of the Jewish

In relation to the lists, Cohen stated in his defense that he had agreed to it because the Jewish leadership feared retaliations if they did not comply, and because he intended to save prominent Jews who would be able to rebuild the Jewish community after the war. He compared his choice to that of a general forced to sacrifice part of his army. The general, Cohen claimed, would also try to save his best soldiers.<sup>60</sup> During several meetings of the honor court, he emphasized that he had still been under the assumption that most Jews would return from “the East” when he made this decision.<sup>61</sup> Cohen, furthermore, noted that his sole aim had always been to serve the Jewish community at large and to save as many Jews as possible.<sup>62</sup>

The parallels between Cohen’s defense and Baeck’s words, which had been recorded by Cohen in his notebook, is clear. In the end, Dutch Council functionaries never produced a final list of those who would lose their protection. While departments of the Jewish Council started working on summaries of employees who were not longer strictly necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the organization, they had not finished the job. Mirjam Levie, secretary of the Jewish Council, described these stressful and emotional days in an unsent letter to her fiancé Leo Bolle, who resided in Palestine.<sup>63</sup> After days of work, it became clear that it was impossible to provide the requested seven thousand names. As a result, the head of the Security Service in Amsterdam SS-Sturmbannführer Lages initiated a mass raid in Amsterdam, arresting 3,300 Jews, including members of the Jewish Council, who were officially still exempted from deportation.<sup>64</sup> This was the retaliation Cohen feared.<sup>65</sup>

Honor Court, see its report from December 17, 1947, signed by secretary Karlsberg and chairman Bosboom: Inv. No. 8, dossier 201 (Joodse Raad), 234, NHA.

60 David Cohen, “Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland tijdens de bezetting,” p. 21, 181j, Inv. No. 10; Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 3, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA. For Cohen’s reflection on the course of events in May 1943, see: Cohen, *Voorzitter van de Joodse Raad*, 166-71. For Aus der Füntens threat of retaliation, see: Meeting between SS Hauptsturmbannführer Aus der Füntens, Asscher, Cohen and Sluzker, May 21, 1943, 182.4, NIOD.

61 Sessions of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947 p. 2; March 17, 1947, p. 5, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, NHA.

62 Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 4, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA.

63 Mirjam Bolle, *Ik zal je beschrijven hoe een dag er hier uitziet. Dagboekbrieven uit Amsterdam, Westerbork en Bergen-Belsen* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 2005; first ed. 2003), 121-26. For further reading on this episode, see: Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 209-17.

64 Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 3, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA; Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 217-18.

65 Cohen, *Voorzitter van de Joodse Raad*, 170; Bolle, *Ik zal je beschrijven*, 124.



The question of why Jewish leaders decided to cooperate with German authorities in the face of mass deportations has preoccupied scholars for decades. Some scholars contended that this was simply an act of self-preservation. In their view, Jewish leaders were first and foremost focused on saving their own skins.<sup>66</sup> The historiography has significantly developed in recent decades, and this growth in the scholarship has resulted in a nuanced understanding of Jewish leaders' motivations. Studies have shown that the fear of retaliation, Jewish leaders' belief that the policy of cooperation would allow them to have influence over the deportation process, and the feeling that Jewish communities would be better off in case a "Jewish Council" functioned as an intermediary, played a part. In his seminal articles on the Jewish Council phenomenon, Dan Diner argued that Jewish leaders initially cooperated to slow down the worsening conditions for Jews and to make the Nazi deportation policies more predictable. In the face of extermination, their strategy shifted to "rescue through labor," a policy (in)famously adopted by Chaim Rumkowski in the Łódź ghetto.<sup>67</sup>

This policy of "rescue through labor" never materialized in Western Europe. Only in the Netherlands, when Reich Commissioner Aus der Fünten indicated to Asscher and Cohen on January 28, 1943 that concentration camp Vught, the only SS concentration camp outside Germany, would become a major "working camp," did the council leadership make concrete plans to ensure productivity of Jewish inmates. For example, under the guidance of diamond merchant Abraham Asscher, it was proposed to establish diamond industries both in Westerbork transit camp as well as in Vught: "this way, the Jews will be productive, not only for their own community, but for the common good"; this was the conclusion of a meeting between the two council chairmen and four prominent Nazis in the Netherlands.<sup>68</sup> In the end, even though preparations were

66 For example, Maurice Rajsfus, *Des Juifs dans la collaboration: l'UGIF 1941-1944* (Paris: Études et Documentation Internationales, 1990); Hans Knoop, *De Joodsche Raad: Het drama van Abraham Asscher en David Cohen* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1983).

67 Yisrael Gutman, "The Concept of Labor in Judenrat Policy," in *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Occupied Europe, 1933-1945*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Cynthia Haft (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), 151-80; Dan Diner, "Beyond the Conceivable: The Judenrat as Borderline Experience," in *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 120.

68 Report produced by the Dutch Council leadership on their meeting with Lages, Blumenthal, Aus der Fünten and Wörlein, February 26, 1943, 182.4, NIOD. Apart from diamond factories, other propositions were also made in relation to Vught,

made, these plans were never realized.<sup>69</sup> This being the case, what was the motivation for Jewish leaders in the West to continue cooperating with the Germans after the start of the mass deportations in summer 1942?

In the case of the Dutch Jewish Council, historian Bart van der Boom summarized four reasons that explain why Jewish leaders continued to cooperate with German authorities: 1) fear of escalation and retaliations; 2) the hope to moderate German policies; 3) safeguarding the provision of aid; and 4) to have influence over the selection of those deported by arranging exemptions.<sup>70</sup> Ever since around four hundred Jewish men who had been arrested in February 1941 were subsequently sent to Mauthausen and their death notices reached their families in the Netherlands shortly thereafter, German authorities used the threat of “Mauthausen” to force the Jewish leadership comply.<sup>71</sup> To this we can add that Jewish leaders felt they could function, in Cohen’s own words, as a “protective wall” between German functionaries and Jewish communities.<sup>72</sup>

In Belgium and France, cooperation between the Jewish leaders and German (and, in France, Vichy) authorities was of a different nature because the contexts in which the AJB, UGIF-Nord, and UGIF-Sud

including chemical industries, as well as the production of mattresses, clothing, and wooden shoes (*klompen*), see: Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 154.

69 During the pretrial investigations of the Dutch Council leadership, people testified that some machines of the Diamant factory and Boas and Asscher’s own diamond factory, both in Amsterdam, were moved to Vught. See: Dossier Abraham Asscher and David Cohen, CABR, Access No. 2.09.09, Inv. No. 107491 I (PF Amsterdam T70982), Nationaal Archief Den Haag (NA).

70 Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 323–28. He argues that, in fact, Jewish leaders’ motivations for cooperating did not change after the start of the mass deportations.

71 Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 157–58; Van der Boom, *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad*, 39–53. For further reading on the arrest and fate of these Jewish men, see: Wally de Lang, *De razzia’s van 22 en 23 februari 1941 in Amsterdam: het lot van 389 Joodse Mannen* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2021). On the fear of Mauthausen among Dutch Jews, see: Nannie Beekman, “Anything but Mauthausen: The Fear of Mauthausen Among Dutch Jews During the Nazi Occupation: Dimensions and Impact” (MA thesis, University of Haifa, 2017).

72 Session of the Jewish Honor Court, April 2, 1947, p. 4, Inv. No. 8, dossier 201, 234, NHA; Cohen, ‘uiteenzetting over de principes van ons werk’ 181j, Inv. No. 11, NIOD. Cohen listed seven principles that justified their wartime behavior. He claimed cooperation allowed them 1) to have influence over German policies; 2) to serve as a protective “wall”; 3) to delay German policies; 4) to make sure Jews would work in the Netherlands rather than in Germany; 5) to prevent raids; 6) to get a hold of lists (of Jews who would be called for transport—LV), 7) to try to influence German policies by reaching out to various officials within the German administration.

functioned were different. As has been argued, various German (and Vichy) authorities did not have as much control over the Jewish organizations in these countries as the SS had in the Netherlands. To the contrary, in Belgium, partly because the organization failed to bring all the Jews in the country under its umbrella, German authorities seem to have lost interest in the organization by late 1942. Similarly, in France, both the UGIF-Nord and the UGIF-Sud never managed to function as umbrella organizations for all Jews in the country. While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these matters in detail, German dissatisfaction with the organizations grew during the occupation.<sup>73</sup>

As a result, the deportation process was carried out largely outside the framework of these organizations. In Belgium in July and August 1942, the AJB distributed summonses that compelled Jews to report for “work under police supervision” (*Polizeilicher Arbeitseinsatz*) in “the East.” Like the Dutch Jewish Council, the AJB leadership even encouraged Jews to comply. When this system proved ineffective because many failed to self-report, German authorities organized mass raids. In France, where the system of summonses was absent and Jews were arrested in raids, Vichy or German authorities never instrumentalized the UGIF in the deportation process like this. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the Jewish Council closely monitored the deportation process and continued to regulate the elaborate system of temporary exemptions from deportation. Only in the spring of 1943, when the Germans systematically arrested Jews through mass raids, was the Dutch Council sidelined.<sup>74</sup> Exemption lists included, among others, Portuguese Jews and other Jews with foreign nationality, as well Jews who had “bought” their (temporary) exemptions by handing over their diamonds and other valuables.<sup>75</sup> In the end, this system proved illusory because German authorities eventually revoked exemptions for most of these groups. Nothing similar occurred in Belgium and France. In these countries, Jewish leaders attempted to have individuals removed from deportation lists, but this was an ad-hoc system with little success in most cases.

The different status of the AJB, the UGIF-Nord, and the UGIF-Sud meant that Jewish leaders had more leeway to set their own boundaries. On various occasions, Jewish leaders in Belgium and France claimed that they *exclusively* wished to focus on the provision of social welfare. The first UGIF-Nord chairman, for example, was adamant that the organization

73 For further reading, see: Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration*, 142–56.

74 Griffioen and Zeller, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België*, 583–633.

75 Idem., 631.

had a purely social role, an attitude he maintained even when Alois Brunner increased his pressure on the organization in summer 1943.<sup>76</sup> In Belgium, the first chairman of the AJB, Salomon Ullmann, claimed that he stepped down after the start of the mass deportations in summer 1942 in part because he feared his future tasks would stretch beyond the provision of social welfare.<sup>77</sup> Jewish leaders in Belgium and France were not entirely successful in their aims as they could not prevent their organizations from being used—though not systematically—to prepare the deportation process. After all, the AJB assisted with the distribution of summonses in summer 1942. In France, German authorities also sometimes used the UGIF to help organize the removal of Jews from French territory. An infamous example is that of the Jewish children who were housed in the care home of Neuilly, which was administered by the UGIF. The children were arrested in July 1944 and deported to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, in contrast to the Dutch Jewish Council, Jewish leaders in Belgium and France could hew much closer to their initial objective, namely, the provision of social welfare.

This is a pattern that can be identified across Europe more broadly: those “Jewish Councils” that were (initially) established as local organizations and were directly overseen by local SS authorities, including the numerous *Judenräte* in Poland, were more involved in the deportation process than were their counterparts that held a legal status and were (at least in part) overseen by local (e.g., Belgian, French, or Hungarian) authorities. Although the explanations for this differ, we can identify some commonalities. In Hungary, and to some extent in France too, the “Jewish Councils” were never indispensable because of the active collaboration of Hungarian and French (police) authorities. In all these countries, the “Jewish Councils,” moreover, did not enjoy the same level of authority over the Jewish communities they were forced to represent. More transnational and comparative research is needed to address these issues.

<sup>76</sup> Cohen, *The Burden of Conscience*, 90.

<sup>77</sup> Laurien Vastenhout, “Filling a Leadership Void: Salomon Ullmann and the AJB during Nazi Occupation,” *Les Cahiers de la Mémoire Contemporaine/Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Herinnering* 16 (2023): 171–203.

<sup>78</sup> Michel Laffitte, *Juif dans la France allemande*, 323–27. For the conclusions of the postwar Jewish Honor Court investigation on the accountability of the UGIF for the deportation of these children, see: Comité d’Épuration, *Deportation des enfants: conclusions de l’enquêteur*, CRIF, MDI 311, Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris.

## Afterword

In terms of the distinct histories of establishment and natures of Jewish Councils and similar imposed organizations in Europe, there are not only parallels between “Jewish Councils” in Western European countries; we can also identify some strong similarities between the Dutch Jewish Council, the *Judenräte* in Poland, and analogous organizations in Central and Eastern Europe. These similarities also extend to the choices the Jewish leaders faced. Despite the different contexts of Nazi rule and variations in anti-Jewish persecution, most “Jewish Council” leaders confronted very similar dilemmas in the end. It is, therefore, not surprising that the rhetoric of the Dutch Council chairman David Cohen resembles that of his counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe. These persons include not only Leo Baeck, as Cohen himself reflected on, but also the rabbi of Kovno Abraham Duber Cagan Shapiro, who argued that when an entire community is threatened, community leaders have a duty to save as many Jews as possible by whatever means at their disposal.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, as we have seen, transnational perspectives that stretch beyond the persistent “East” versus “West” dichotomy in Holocaust historiography are necessary to understand the impact of local conditions on German policies. They also show how much German policies were built on previous experiences and blueprints in countries with (radically) different sociopolitical contexts. To comprehend the Jewish Council phenomenon, a transnational perspective is, therefore, necessary. Numerous local studies have successfully countered the simplistic notion that Jewish Councils and similar imposed organizations were instruments of collaboration fully in the hands of the Nazis. While these studies have resulted in more nuanced understandings of Jewish leaders’ wartime responses, scholars should now pay more attention to understanding how these organizations fit within the wider context of German rule during the Second World War.

79 As cited in Diner, “Beyond the Conceivable,” 127.